

**HB 5959 and HB 5804**  
**December 3, 2014**

**Statement of Henry Grix and Howard Israel, to Hon. Frank Foster, Chair, Commerce Committee**

Our names are Henry Grix and Howard Israel. We write to express our conviction that Michigan will be a far better place to live and work if the Legislature immediately amends the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include protection from discrimination based upon sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

Who are we, and why does this matter to us? We are lifelong Michigan residents, as were our parents and grandparents before us. We both graduated from the University of Michigan, where Henry also secured his law degree. Henry has spent his career as a member of the law firm of Dickinson Wright PLLC in Detroit and Troy, and Howard now works full-time as a community volunteer. During the course of our 27-year committed relationship, we have been primary caregivers for our late parents and for Henry's late sister. More happily, we now are regular babysitters for our grandnephews, Jacob and Micah, aged 4 1/2 and 2 1/2. We both volunteer in support of a number of nonprofit charitable organizations, including the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, Harper Hospital in Detroit, KICK – the Agency for LGBT African Americans, and the Ruth Ellis Center. In other words, we are solid citizens who have deep roots in this state and who give back to our communities.

We also are relative “newly-weds,” having married in New York in January 2012 after 25 years together. We regret that we were unable to marry in our home state, and we are disturbed that Michigan treats LGBT individuals and couples like second-class citizens, unworthy of equal treatment under the law. We are fortunate that Henry's workplace recognizes our relationship, but we are constantly aware that we live in a state where lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals can be fired or denied housing for no reason other than the perception of our sexual orientation or gender identity. This legal discrimination not only is unfair but also is bad public policy, driving away talented individuals who otherwise might contribute to a better Michigan. Through our volunteer support for LGBT students at the University of Michigan Law School, we know that talented graduates write off Michigan as a place to live and work because of the hostile political climate, particularly as compared to more vital states like Illinois, New York, or California.

As an estate planner, Henry encounters clients, both LGBT and heterosexual, who seek advice about relocating to states with laws that protect all citizens and recognize LGBT relationships. If “reinventing Michigan” is to be more than a political slogan, the Legislature must act now to amend the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include protection from discrimination based upon sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.